

December 19, 2005      Congress passed an immigration bill last week that takes some small steps toward asserting control over our nation's porous borders. I supported the bill despite its lack of substance, in the hope that it will move America in the right direction on the critical issue of illegal immigration. Some measures in the bill sound good, but are in effect superfluous. Do we need new legislation requiring the Department of Homeland Security to achieve "operational control of the borders"? Shouldn't the federal government already have "operational control of the borders"? Here is a road map for real immigration reform. First we need better enforcement of the laws we've got-- which plainly call for illegal immigrants to be arrested and deported and for our borders to be secured. These things are already law, but the executive branch has failed to enforce them for decades. Second, we need to eliminate the two main magnets attracting illegal immigrants to illegally enter the country, the welfare magnet and the citizenship magnet. Failure to address these in an immigration bill raises questions about achieving real results. That is why I introduced three amendments to this bill, in the hopes that we can finally do something about the problem of illegal immigration. I introduced an amendment to end so-called "birth-right citizenship," whereby anyone born on US soil is automatically an American citizen. I also introduced an amendment to end the practice of providing US Social Security payments to non-US citizens. And finally I introduced an amendment to prohibit illegal aliens from receiving food stamps, student loans, or other federally provided assistance. Without these magnets, we would know that everyone coming to America wanted to work hard and support himself. There are some elements of this new bill to be applauded. Measures to require detention of and expedited removal of aliens, for example, are a good step. Also to be applauded is the requirement for an additional 250 inspectors at U.S. ports of entry each year from 2007 through 2010, although this is unfortunately subject to the availability of funds. But overall this bill is a weak substitute for real immigration and border reform. As the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) says, HR 4437 "treats some of the symptoms, it does not, in fact, do enough to actually cure the illness." Congress and the administration are still way behind the American people on the immigration issue. American culture is rooted in political and legal traditions based on liberty and constitutionally limited government—and we rightfully expect immigrants to respect and learn about those traditions. Real immigration reform, based on asserting our sovereign right to retain a cultural identity, will be a huge issue in next year's congressional elections and the 2008 presidential election.